



COST OF A FALSE ALARM

Analysis of the socioeconomic impact of unfounded Child Protective Services investigations in Monroe County (2024)

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SNAPSHOT & BOTTOM LINE

Why This Matters

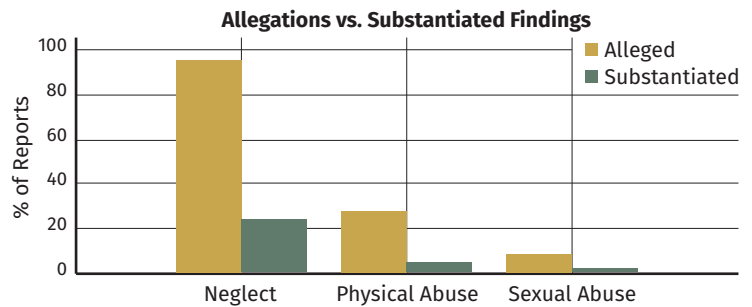
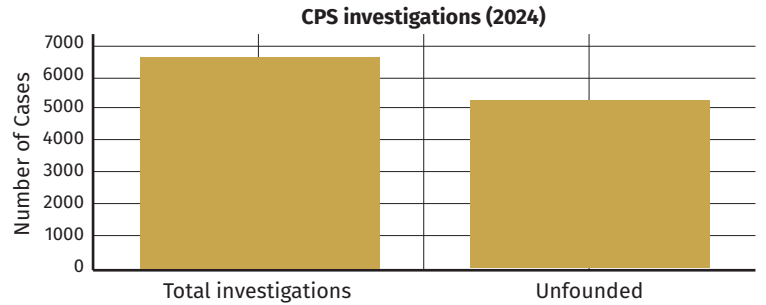
Too many CPS calls are accepted for investigation without sufficient basis. Families shoulder fear and stigma while public dollars chase poverty indicators rather than maltreatment. The cost are both financial and human.

At A Glance

- **6,768** CPS investigations in 2024
- **~76% unfounded** → 5,140 cases
- **Average case length: ~65 days**
- **Open unfounded cases on a typical day: ~915**

Allegations vs Findings

- **Neglect alleged: 96.6%** of reports
- **Neglect substantiated: 21.9%**
- Physical abuse alleged 24.2% → substantiated 3.6%
- Sexual abuse alleged 6.4% → substantiated 1.0%



Takeaway: Need is often reported as neglect. Most allegations are not substantiated after investigation.

Where Reports Come From (Top Sources)

Social services staff	Education personnel	Parents	Friends or Neighbors	Law enforcement	Mental health	Medical
26.8%	15.4%	10.9%	9.5%	8.9%	7.9%	5.4%



Direct Cost of Unfounded Investigations

Per case:

\$2,676

Annual total:

\$13.76M

Cost Component	2024 Total \$	Per Case \$
Salaries & fringe	\$6.89 M	\$1,340
Travel	\$0.11 M	\$20
Central overhead (IDC)	\$2.2 M	\$432
Turnover	\$1.4 M	\$273
Legal & court	\$0.70 M	\$137
Vendor-contracted services	\$0.21 M	\$41
Subtotal government	\$11.54 M	\$2,243
Parent lost wages	\$2.22M	\$433
Total direct cost	\$13.76M	\$2,676

The Bottom Line

- **\$11.54M** in annual government spend tied to unfounded cases alone.

- Families lose **\$2.22M** in wages for time spent complying with investigations.
- Dollars follow investigations that rarely confirm maltreatment.

HUMAN IMPACT & POLICY DIRECTION

Human Impact (Indirect Costs)



Trauma to children and parents. Intrusive procedures and repeated contact create fear, shame, and anxiety that can persist after closure.



Measured effects on youth. Research links CPS contact to higher externalizing and internalizing behaviors, with ripple effects on school and health.



Loss of trust. Families avoid hospitals, schools, and social services when contact may trigger a report. Needed help is delayed or declined.



Disproportionate burden. Low income, Black, Latine, and Indigenous families experience far higher investigation rates, concentrating harm and eroding community trust.

Policy Recommendations

- 1. Supporting Families Together Act (A2135)**
Refocus practice by repealing civil and criminal penalties for mandated reporters. Encourages professional judgment, reduces fear-based reporting, and helps families access support without surveillance.
- 2. Maternal Health, Dignity and Consent Act (A860/S845)**
Require clear written and verbal informed consent for perinatal drug testing and screening, with disclosure of potential CPS consequences. Protects families from non consensual testing and unintended system involvement.
- 3. Child and Family Well Being Fund**
Seed a community governed fund to invest in small, neighborhood nonprofits that address basic needs, stabilize families, and prevent CPS involvement upstream.

What Success Looks Like in Monroe County



Fewer unfounded investigations and shorter cases durations.



Higher uptake of voluntary services without fear of surveillance.



Reinvestment of recaptured CPS dollars into housing, childcare, and family supports.



Narrowed racial disparities in investigations and outcomes.

Suggested Local Actions

- Adopt clear county guidance distinguishing poverty-related need from neglect.
- Expand trusted, non-mandated access points for help in high-report neighborhoods.
- Track and publish quarterly metrics: percent unfounded, median case days open, referrals to voluntary supports, and family experience data.

Sources

OCFS Monitoring & Analysis Profiles (2020–2024); OCFS CPS dashboard; Monroe County DHS 2024 budget; Onondaga County 2025 budget; Wells & Dettlaff (2021); Welch & Price (2023); NYC ACS (2023); Casey Family Programs; WHEC TV (2023); Connecticut Public (2023).